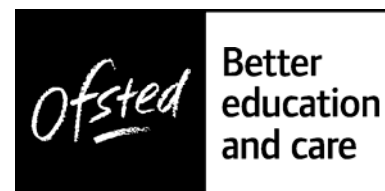


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5 July 2005

Miss P Raffill
Headteacher
Royal Park Primary School
Riverside Road
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Dear Miss Raffill

Implementation of Royal Park Primary School's Action Plan

Following my visit to your school on 27 and 28 June 2005, I write to confirm the findings and to notify you of the outcomes.

As you know, the inspection was part of a policy involving a broader series of visits by HMI and Additional Inspectors to check on the development and improvement of schools which have been designated by their section 10 inspection as having serious weaknesses. You will recall that the focus of the inspection was to assess: the quality of the action plan; the pupils' standards of attainment and their progress; the quality of education provided; the leadership and management of the school; the pupils' attitudes and behaviour; and the progress that has been made in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the serious weaknesses.

During the visit I inspected 11 part lessons; attended an assembly; scrutinised a wide range of documentation provided by the school; and held discussions with you, the chair of governors, the LEA link adviser, and nominated staff on the areas for improvement identified in the section 10 inspection. I examined samples of pupils' work in lessons and spoke informally with other staff and pupils.

On the basis of the evidence gathered during the visit, I made the following observations to you, the deputy headteacher, the chair and vice-chair of governors, and the link adviser from Bexley LEA.

The proportion of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is in line with the national average at about 23 per cent. The proportion who have special educational needs is above average at 28 per cent and includes ten pupils who have physical disabilities and are taught mainly in mainstream classes.

The school has had difficulty in recent years in recruiting and retaining teachers. At the time of the visit, the Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 co-ordinator was

absent through long-term illness. One permanent and one agency teacher were also away ill. The deputy headteacher covered one class. Another agency teacher and a teacher on a temporary one-term contract covered two vacancies. A full complement of permanent staff has been appointed for next September.

Standards as measured by national test results have been below national averages in the past two years especially at the end of Key Stage 1. In 2005 there was an improvement in writing with 61 per cent of Year 2 pupils gaining Level 2 or above compared with only 48 per cent the previous year. Mathematics results also improved, but the proportions gaining the higher Level 3 in reading, writing and mathematics were lower than in 2004 and well below national averages.

Results of the 2005 tests at Key Stage 2 had not yet been received. On the school's predicted results, mathematics showed improvement to 63 per cent of Year 6 pupils gaining at least Level 4 and 25 per cent gaining Level 5. For English, a decline was forecast on the previous year at Level 4 and above, from 81 per cent to 63 per cent, but an improvement at Level 5. Comparisons in 2004, with schools whose pupils had similar prior attainment at Key Stage 1, showed performance in English to be average, but well below average in mathematics and science. The trend in average points scores for the three core subjects has been below the national trend.

In lessons and workbooks there are signs of improvement in English and mathematics in Year 6 and some improvement in Year 2, but this is not consistent between the classes. Weaknesses in pupils' work are beginning to be identified and remedied in their writing, comprehension, and investigative mathematics, but frequent errors, for example in spelling, grammar and calculation will need to be corrected more systematically. There were good examples of extended writing in history in Year 4. Such improvements are not yet being sustained across the school in order to provide steadier progress over time and a more secure foundation of basic skills in Years 1 and 2, building on the successful practice in the Nursery and Reception classes.

The quality of teaching was satisfactory or better in all the lessons and good in six. The quality of learning and the progress made by the pupils was at least satisfactory in nine lessons, in two of which the learning was good. The pupils sometimes made less progress than they were capable of because tasks did not stretch them enough or were not well matched to their needs. Strengths of the teaching are the generally good relationships between adults and pupils and effective class management. Lesson planning is detailed and thorough but tends to focus on tasks and content rather than the amount and quality of work expected. The use of worksheets is less dominant than at the time of the last inspection but still sometimes constrains the pupils' learning, giving them too little chance to discuss and share ideas or difficulties. In the best lessons, new learning was carefully reinforced and the teacher provided a good model of spoken language.

At present, five of the classes contain pupils of more than one year-group. Planning and monitoring for progression are not equally effective between the classes. From September, single-year classes will be formed, assisting, though not removing, the need to match tasks appropriately to the higher and lower attainers in each group.

The quality of leadership and management is satisfactory and improving but will need to improve further, especially in demonstrating an impact on pupils' standards and achievement. The headteacher and her deputy work together well and are beginning to gain the confidence to provide direction and purpose for the school. Their commitment to improvement and awareness of what needs to be done are good. The school is competently managed and administered.

The school's action plan is sound. It provides a clear timeline and checklist of all the areas needing improvement. It is comprehensive in addressing each shortcoming mentioned in the report. This produces a lengthy plan with many actions and some cross-referencing, but it has not held up progress in bringing about improvement. There are measurable success criteria and the persons monitoring the actions are specified. Evaluation methods and priorities for achievement may need indicating at this halfway stage of the plan's implementation.

The LEA's commentary appraises the governors' action plan fairly. It mentions that the school has been causing concern for some years and that a focus group was set up which continues to meet termly. The target date for recovery of January 2006 is reasonable. Actions in support include links with partner schools; the appointment of additional governors; and a programme of advisor visits. However, the statement is not specific about how management and leadership will be made more effective. The commentary and statement of action are sound.

The support provided and initiated by the LEA has proved effective in practice: especially through its Intensifying Support Programme (ISP) centred on assessment and tracking pupils' progress. The LEA arranged for an experienced former headteacher to act as consultant, visiting the school weekly in order to advise, monitor and evaluate progress. This has been particularly successful and well received.

The former chair of governors retired and a new chair and vice-chair have taken up office. The vice-chair, together with the headteacher and LEA link adviser, attended an Ofsted seminar on action planning. The involvement of governors in helping to draw up the action plan and monitoring progress have been valuable in supporting the school as well as holding it to account for the improvements made. A meeting with parents to discuss the plan helped to involve them also, retaining their loyalty and answering queries.

The ethos of the school is generally strong and improving. The pupils' attitudes and behaviour were satisfactory or better in all the lessons and good or very good

in seven. They were eager to learn. Occasional restlessness occurred when tasks had been finished and the pupils were not sure what to do next. They collaborated well in groups when the purpose of the activity was clear. Parents have sometimes expressed concern about bullying during playtimes. No such incidents were observed during this visit. The nature and level of adult supervision were appropriate.

A school assembly was well led by the parish priest and included hand-bell ringing by pupils, singing, and a spiritual as well as moral content. The spread of school buildings across a large site, and long corridors, make it difficult to establish a sense of communal endeavour, but improved displays celebrating pupils' work and activities are helping to do so.

Action taken to address the improvements needed

1. improve the quality of teaching and raise standards of attainment and achievement, particularly in Years 1 and 2

The improvements in Year 2 test results in writing and mathematics are encouraging, but senior managers are aware that more consistency and clearer progression are needed in the three classes at Key Stage 1. A weak agency teacher has left and the deputy headteacher has taken over co-ordination of the phase while the postholder is absent. Lesson planning is carried out jointly and is monitored.

Progress is reasonable.

2. take positive action to improve pupils' attendance and punctuality

The target set by the LEA for attendance is 93.7 per cent by the summer of next year. Last term's figure of just over 90.4 per cent fell well short of that. However, in the first half of the summer term attendance averaged 92 per cent and it was around 94 per cent during the two days of this inspection. Among Key Stage 1 pupils, attendance remains poor, at below 90 per cent on last term's figures. Punctuality to school in the mornings has improved. More rigorous recording and monitoring have been introduced, and parents are made aware of the effect of absences on the pupils' progress.

Progress is limited, despite the school's best efforts.

3. improve leadership and management by rigorous monitoring of teaching and learning

Monitoring of lessons, planning and pupils' workbooks has taken place by senior managers and by the consultant headteacher, who, with LEA advisers, has helped to train staff and provide exemplar material. The resulting comments are succinct

and outline targets for improvement. The monitoring is of good quality but needs to be focused on standards of the pupils' work and on follow-up to sustain improvements.

Progress is good.

4. extend and improve the co-ordinator's role

The subject leaders for English and mathematics have taken more initiative in developing their subjects in order to ensure a better match of teaching to the pupils' needs. The structure of management, including the roles of the key-stage leaders, is now under review. Subject co-ordinators have scrutinised work samples and are being trained in monitoring lessons. The impact on raising standards consistently across the school will need to increase.

Progress is reasonable.

5. make more use of assessment information to match tasks to pupils' abilities

The ISP programme is helping teachers to assess the levels of pupils' work more reliably and to track their progress. Individual and group targets are set and some marking and lesson planning take these into account, but there is further to go in using the information to guide teaching in each class. Not all the marking gives an indication of levels reached and what is needed for improvement. The deputy headteacher's expertise is well used and the importance of the area is recognized, but the influence on practice is patchy as yet.

Progress is reasonable.

6. develop numeracy, literacy and information and communication technology (ICT) systematically across the curriculum

Good examples were seen of the development of pupils' writing in history, of mathematics skills in science and of ICT in mathematics. The core subject leaders are contributing to this but it is not yet systematic. Further developments are needed especially at Key Stage 1.

Progress is reasonable.

In addition, there has been progress in responding to other issues from the report, such as relations with parents, school visits, competitive sport, and the use of artefacts or more varied resources in lessons. In each of these areas, improvements have been made.

Overall, reasonable progress has been made in implementing the action plan and removing the causes of the school's serious weaknesses.

I am copying this letter to the Secretary of State, the chair of governors, and the Director of Education for Bexley. This letter will also be posted on the Ofsted website.

Yours sincerely

MICHAEL WEBB
Additional Inspector

cc: chair of governors
LEA